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ABSTRACT

In the past, post-secondary education has been an option for welfare recipients wishing to increase their earning power. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA) shifted federal policy and made it more difficult for welfare recipients to pursue a college education. Nevertheless, several work activities that count as participation under PRWORA could be provided by post-secondary education. Furthermore, PRWORA gives states considerable flexibility in establishing a role for post-secondary education in their welfare-to-work programs. When deciding how to use this flexibility, states may want to consider the following issues: the extend to which welfare recipients are allowed and supported in non-vocational post-secondary education; the extent to which states encourage development of shorter-term training programs; how college education can be combined with work to meet work requirements for welfare recipients; and the role of community colleges in providing and coordinating vocational training and other employment services. Research has confirmed the effectiveness of gaining a college degree in increasing an individual's employment and earnings and has revealed several innovative practices in the areas of state support of higher education and community college programs for welfare recipients. (Includes 12 resource contacts and 22 publications.) (MN)

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Post-secondary Education Under Welfare Reform

by Marie Cohen

Background

In the past, post-secondary education has been an option for welfare recipients who wished to increase their earning power. In many states, people could receive welfare grants while attending community or four-year colleges. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA) shifted the emphasis of federal policy toward a "Work First" approach, making it more difficult for welfare recipients to pursue a college education. To avoid financial penalties, states must each year place an increasing proportion of their caseload in work activities prescribed by the statute. Moreover, in order to be counted as engaged in approved work activities, a single parent must be in those activities for at least 20 hours per week in fiscal year 1998, 25 hours in 1999, and 30 hours thereafter. The parents in a two-parent family must together put in at least 35 hours per week, or 55 hours for those receiving federally funded childcare.

Several work activities that count as participation under PRWORA could be provided by post-secondary institutions. It is up to the states to define these activities, which are not defined by PRWORA or by HHS in its regulations. The approved category of "vocational educational training" might be defined to include at least some college programs, especially the vocational training courses that are pursued by many community college students. But "vocational educational training" may count as a work activity for only 12 months for any individual. Moreover, no more than 30% of those TANF recipients that a state counts as engaged in work activities can be in vocational educational training. In the year 2000 and thereafter, teenage parents in high school, GED programs, or education directly related to employment will also be included in the 30% cap, effectively reducing by half the number of adults who can be counted as participating in work activities by virtue of engaging in training.

PRWORA also lists "job skills training" and "education directly related to employment," as work activities. These categories could also be defined to include vocational courses offered by a post-secondary institution, but these activities may not count toward the first 20 hours per week of participation required by PRWORA for single parents (unless the participant is a teenage parent). Thus, these activities cannot count toward federal participation rate requirements until 1999, when they can count toward only the last five hours of participation. In 2000 and thereafter, these activities can count for 10 of the required 30 hours. For adults in two-parent families, these activities can count toward only five of the required hours.

Non-vocational post-secondary education is not an approved activity under PRWORA. However, students can still be counted toward state work requirements as long as they are also putting in the required number of hours on approved activities. Moreover, a state that has enough people participating in approved work activities to meet the requirements can allow other people to participate in post-secondary education as a stand-alone activity. States are not prohibited from using their TANF funds on non-vocational post-secondary

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education, as long as it serves the goals of the TANF program.

The Secretaries of Health and Human Services and Education have urged states to encourage welfare recipients to stay in school by combining education with required work activities. In a September 1997 letter, they urged colleges to work with state and local officials to provide employment opportunities that are aligned with academic schedules and allow students to stay in school. In particular, they suggest the use of the Federal Work-Study Program to enable students to meet TANF work requirements.

Policy Issues

PRWORA gives states considerable flexibility in establishing a role for post-secondary education in their welfare-to-work programs. In deciding how to use this flexibility, states may want to consider the following questions.

To what extent should TANF recipients be allowed and supported in non-vocational post-secondary education as a stand-alone activity or in combination with work or other activities? While the federal government might allow a state to define a post-secondary degree program as vocational educational training, a state cannot count participants in this activity as working beyond one year. Thus, since most degree programs are at least two years, a state that wants to allow its TANF recipients to participate in a degree program as a stand-alone activity must be either able to meet federal participation requirements without counting these people or willing to devote its own resources—segregated from federal funds—to this purpose.

There is a wide spectrum of options on this issue. On one extreme, a state can allow TANF recipients to participate in post-secondary education only after putting in the required amount of time in approved work activities, and not provide support services. A more pro-college position would be to require a minimum number of hours in approved work activities, but to provide support services or other assistance for those who choose to go to college in addition to their approved activities. On the most supportive end of the spectrum, a state can allow and support college as a stand-alone activity. To avoid financial penalties, such a state must either have enough people in approved activities to meet federal requirements or create a separate state program to finance this education, thus removing college students from the participation calculations.

Proponents of post-secondary education as a stand-alone activity argue that it is the best way to ensure that welfare recipients can find stable jobs that pay well enough to move them out of poverty. They also argue that it is unrealistic to expect welfare mothers to work 20-30 hours and also go to school, at the same time as they are trying to raise young children. Opponents argue that schooling is more effective after a person has held a job, that it is unfair to subsidize college for welfare recipients when those who are not on welfare must find time for education outside of work hours, and that there are not strong research results supporting the benefits of college education for TANF recipients.

To what extent should states encourage the development of shorter-term training programs? State welfare agencies can encourage community colleges to develop shorter-term training programs and to compress existing programs into shorter time frames by having classes meet more hours per week. The advantage of shorter-term programs is that people participating in vocational programs for a year or less can be counted toward TANF participation requirements. However, cutting out material (rather than compressing it into shorter time frames) may reduce program effectiveness: research casts doubt on the effectiveness of short-term classroom training. (See Stanley, 1995). Thus, designers of short-term programs should consider making these programs fairly intense and including post-employment services to boost the effectiveness of the training.

How can college education be combined with work to meet the TANF work

requirements? Colleges can make it easier for students to package work and education together by using federal Work Study funds, making community service opportunities available through Americorps or state or local community service programs, or developing internship programs that are coordinated with academic programs. Such an approach will increase opportunities to meet work requirements and may increase participants' future earnings more than either education or work alone. However, there are questions about the extent to which many TANF recipients can handle the combination of work, education, and parental duties. Moreover, this approach may require increased expenditures on childcare.

What should be the role of community colleges in providing and coordinating vocational training and other employment services? There are different models of community college involvement in program planning, management and service provision. In some states, community colleges statewide participate in the development and management of the welfare-to-work system as a partner with the welfare and workforce development agencies. In one model of service delivery, community colleges are under contract to be the case manager for the entire welfare-to-work program or part of it. In another model, a community college or state community college system is given a contract to deliver education or training to welfare recipients as part of a broader welfare-to-work program. In another approach, a community college (for example, Miami-Dade) houses a one-stop job center that co-locates all workforce development programs, including welfare-to-work. Factors that a state or county will want to consider in choosing a model of community college involvement include the strength of the local community college and its experience in dealing with the welfare population and the extent to which community college resources are underutilized due to decreases in college attendance by welfare recipients.

Research Findings

Research suggests that gaining a college degree is an effective way of increasing an individual's employment and earnings. Data show that people with a college education earn substantially more than those who have not attended college. (See U.S. Department of Education, 1998; Spalter-Roth and Hartmann, 1991.) Using the National Longitudinal Survey and attempting to control for differences between those who did and did not enter college, Thomas Kane and Cecilia Rouse estimated that hourly earnings increase by approximately 19 to 23% for women earning an Associate's degree and 28 to 33% for those earning a Bachelor's degree. Other research that attempts to control for differences in innate ability has found substantial earnings gains per year of higher education. (See Stanley, 1995).

Many community colleges provide shorter-term vocational training as well as degree programs. The evidence for the usefulness of such training is mixed. One training program and a few welfare-to-work programs offering training as a service have been shown to be effective in increasing welfare recipients' employment and earnings (see Strawn, 1998; Bloom, 1997). The national survey of the Job Training Partnership Act (see Orr *et al.*, 1996) found no increase in earnings for welfare recipients receiving classroom training; however, most of the training studied was very short in duration and other aspects of the study have been criticized as well.

In general, work-based programs have shown better results for welfare recipients than short-term classroom education and training alone. Strong positive effects on welfare recipients' earnings have been found for on-the-job training under the Job Training Partnership Act, and two demonstrations conducted in the 1980s: the Supported Work Demonstration and the Homemaker-Home Health Aide Demonstration. (See Orr, 1996; Bloom, 1997; Strawn, 1998.) These results support models that combine college education with related work-study or internship opportunities.

What States and Counties are Doing

As yet, there is no detailed compendium of state policies toward post-secondary education, but it appears that these policies have become more restrictive. Preliminary data from a quick survey done in May-August 1997 by the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) and the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities indicated that 24 states allowed at least some welfare recipients to meet their work requirements by participating in post-secondary education alone. However, in some of these states, stand-alone college education was permitted only to students who had begun their studies before the implementation of welfare reform. An additional 15 states provided support services for school attendance for TANF recipients who attend school on their own time after complying with work requirements. Out of 15 states that responded to an informal survey by the American Association of Community Colleges, two responded that their state welfare agencies were not counting work-study assignments as TANF work activities.

CLASP currently has a survey in the field that attempts to find out to what extent the states define higher education activities—both alone and when combined with other activities—as work; provide support services for post-secondary education; and provide other financial support for this activity. Results will be available by the end of the summer, 1998. For more information about the survey, contact Lisa Plimpton at CLASP, (202) 328-5161.

According to the U.S. Department of Education, about 428,000 recipients of Aid to Families with Dependent Children received federal student aid in 1995. There have been reports of large drops in the number of students on welfare at several campuses and community college systems (see Schmidt, 1998). However, the extent to which these declines are due to dropping TANF caseloads as opposed to policy changes is unknown.

Advocates of educational opportunities for welfare recipients are supporting legislative change on the federal level and court action on the state and local levels. For example, Senator Paul Wellstone has submitted an amendment that will increase the limit on vocational education for TANF recipients from 12 to 24 months and exclude teenage parents without a high school diploma from the 30% cap on vocational educational training. For information about other legislation, see Finney, 1998. Advocates have also begun to challenge education restrictions in court. In June 1997, a New York State Supreme Court Justice issued a temporary restraining order restricting the City of New York from requiring welfare recipients who are in college to participate in workfare programs if such participation "unduly interferes with their studies."

Innovative Practices

State Policies Supporting Higher Education

Maine created a separate program to enable up to 2,000 students to receive aid without being subject to TANF participation requirements and time limits. Students meeting certain requirements receive benefits equivalent to the cash aid, medical coverage, transitional benefits, and other services they would have received had they become TANF recipients. Contact: Steve Telow, ASPIRE/JOBS Coordinator, (207) 287-3309.

The **Wyoming** legislature authorized a student aid program, funded through state maintenance-of-effort funds, that is available instead of a TANF grant to recipients who have completed an employment assessment, meet income and resources eligibility requirements, and are full-time students in an approved program. There are less than 100 people on this program since Wyoming prefers to place welfare recipients in immediate employment when possible. Contact: Delores Shelton, Economic Assistance Program Consultant, (307) 777-6786.

Several states are helping former TANF recipients continue their education to increase their earning power. **Florida** pays the costs of education, training and necessary support services

for up to two years for anyone who leaves TANF for employment and wants to obtain further education and training. Contact: Terri Bedosky, Planner, Department of Labor and Employment Security, (850) 487-2380. **Utah** pays for up to 24 months of education, training and needed support services for people who go off TANF. Contact: John Davenport, Family Employment Program Specialist, Utah Department of Workforce Services, (801) 468-0244. **Michigan** has set aside $8.5 million in TANF funds for post-employment training. Contact: Janet Howard, Work First Section Chief, Michigan Jobs Commission, (517) 335-5875.

Community College Programs

In addition to their role as a provider of degrees and certificates, community colleges have traditionally been major providers of training to welfare recipients and other disadvantaged groups. Community colleges in many states are providing special programs and services to welfare recipients. In response to a survey by the American Association of Community Colleges (see Pierce, January 1998), 48% of community colleges reported that they offer programs designed specifically for welfare-to-work participants. Many community colleges are moving toward shorter courses and post-employment education and training. Some examples of community college programs for welfare recipients are included below. For other models of community college involvement in welfare-to-work programs, see McKenney, March 1998.

Statewide Initiatives

The **California** legislature allocated $65 million to help community colleges in 1997-1998 to expand and redesign their programs to meet the new requirements of welfare reform. The funds are available to all colleges that wish to participate and file an application. Allowable uses of the funds include child care; work/study employment; job development and placement for students and graduates; curriculum development and redesign to emphasize shorter-term programs; and coordination with welfare departments and other agencies and between programs and services for TANF recipients on campus. Contact Kathleen Nelson, Coordinator, GAIN/Welfare Reform Program, California Community Colleges, (916) 324-2353, or knelson@cc1.ccco.edu.

The **Oklahoma** Department of Human Services (DHS) contracts with the State Regents for Higher Education (SRHE), using TANF funds, to provide vocational education to TANF recipients at two-year colleges. Participating programs must provide at least thirty hours per week of program activities and may not exceed twelve months. Local institutions must provide a 20% match for the state funds. Each county DHS office designates a liaison with its local college who is responsible for communicating policy, gathering information, and eliminating barriers. DHS provides the needed supportive services such as transportation reimbursement, childcare, family planning, and counseling. Two-year colleges that wish to participate must submit proposals to the SRHE. Activities offered by the participating colleges include remedial education, GED preparation, occupational training, internships, job readiness training, life skills, and job search skills. Contact: Kermit McMurry, Vice Chancellor, SRGE, (405) 524-9171.

Vermont's Department of Social Welfare has contracts with the state community college system, one state college, and several private colleges, to provide case management to some participants in Reach-Up, Vermont's welfare-to-work program. Contact: Edward Cafferty, Reach-Up Program Chief/External Activities, (802) 241-2811.

The **Illinois Department of Human Services** funds 15 community colleges to provide education and training to TANF recipients. In 1999, the Community College Board plans to target the program to TANF recipients currently working in low-wage, low-skill jobs. These people will be encouraged to pursue self-sufficiency through further education. Contact: Beverly L. Waldrop, Director for Adult Education, Illinois Community College Board,

(217) 785-0159 or bwaldrop@iccb.state.il.us.

Local Initiatives

In **Washington and Multnomah Counties, Oregon**, the TANF agency contracts with Mt. Hood and Portland Community Colleges to provide the Steps to Success program, which is the local welfare employment program. Steps to Success provides education and employment services to more than 12,000 welfare applicants and recipients annually. Clients begin the program by combining job search with classes designed to improve their job seeking and job retention skills. Those who do not find work during this period may receive a variety of additional services including basic education, GED preparation, vocational training, work experience, mental health and substance abuse counseling, and special classes for those who are learning disabled or have very low basic skills. Employers are involved in curriculum development for industry-specific training and in providing work experience opportunities. The U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services, Education, and Labor are providing technical assistance workshops that promote the Mt. Hood model. Contact: Nan Poppe, Director, Maywood Park Campus, Mt. Hood Community College, (503) 256-3430 or poppen@mhcc.cc.or.us; Terri Greenfield, Program Director, Employment and Training Services, Portland Community College, (503) 281-0495, ext. 266 or tgreenfi@pcc.edu.

Onondaga Community College has the contract to administer Jobs Plus, the welfare-to-work program in **Onondaga County, New York**, which includes the city of Syracuse. The program operates out of a Learn to Work Center, located in downtown Syracuse. Participants are required to participate in a four-week job club. Those who do not find a job during those four weeks are assessed and assigned to work experience in combination with education, job readiness and life skills training, vocational training, or continued job search. A new option for TANF recipients is Career Clusters, which are a set of courses that can be completed in one or two semesters and relate directly to a specific job where there are local employment opportunities. Participants earn credit toward an eventual degree or certificate and are encouraged to think about continuing their education after they begin employment. Students who complete these clusters can obtain jobs as food handlers, teachers aides, social work aides, and others. About 2,500 public assistance recipients are involved in Jobs Plus. Contact: Patricia Higgins, Jobs Plus Director, (315) 442-3242.

With the advent of Wisconsin's new welfare program, W-2, and based on an employer focus group, **Moraine Park Technical College** in **Fond du Lac, Wisconsin** revised its welfare training courses from longer-term, vocationally focused classes to shorter-term classes focusing on soft skills, such as cooperation, communication, and responsibility. The college currently offers a 10-week hospitality/housekeeping course, a six-week child care course, a 12-week basic office course and a 24-hour job retention workshop focusing on soft skills. The college reports a much higher graduation rate for the shorter-term programs than for the longer courses previously offered to welfare recipients. To measure student progress and communicate student proficiency to employers, the college uses the Workplace Success Skills assessment instrument. The college is now focusing on post-employment services to promote job retention. An eight-week, 24-hour retention course is being offered for new employees at eight companies. Contact: Dennis Nitschke, Vice President, Moraine Park Technical College, (920) 929-2132.

California's West Valley and Mission Community Colleges received a grant from the David and Lucile Packard Foundation to help welfare recipients make the transition to work. Activities include developing a skills center to provide assessment, counseling, and other activities; locating additional work experience and work-study opportunities; increasing child care availability; and adapting and developing educational programs that offer career path opportunities and options for completing programs in less than 12 months. These programs include Certified Nursing Assistant, Home Health Aide, Local Area Network Administrator, and Legal Secretary, among others. The focus is on providing

courses that will lead to immediate employment in positions that are on career ladders, so that employees can return to school and build upon their initial classes. Contact: Dr. Fred Prochaska, Associate Dean for Sponsored Research and Grants, (408) 741-2095.

Oakland Community College in **Pontiac, Michigan** received an award from the American Association of Community Colleges and the U.S. Department of Labor for its Advanced Technology Program, which offers work-based instruction, work readiness skills, and mentoring to welfare recipients. Students choose from training in systems administration, machine tool technology, and robotic assembly technology. The program works closely with employers, including EDS corporation and Kelly Services, and has a placement rate of 86%. Entrants must have a high school degree or equivalent and read at the tenth grade level. Among other factors, the awards panel found this program notable for being one of the few programs to target high technology jobs for welfare recipients. The Michigan Legislature has appropriated $4 million to expand the program statewide. Contact: Karen Pagenette, Director, Workforce Development Services, (248) 340-6787.

Daytona Beach Community College responded to welfare reform in Florida by developing short-term, 10-16-week training programs that incorporated the material offered in the first portion of an existing certificate program in fields like nursing, modern office technology, boat lamination and electronics repair. While in training, participants are provided with work experience placements that are in their chosen fields and that satisfy Florida's requirement that students be working as well. The college also lowered its reading requirement for such programs to seventh or eighth grade and is combining adult education with the vocational training. Graduates of these programs are marketable to employers and are encouraged to return to community college once employed to finish their certificates. The college also has a grant to provide job coaching to TANF recipients who are placed on jobs. Contact: Jerry Frisby, Dean, Adult Education and Training, (904) 947-5455.

El Paso Community College has developed vocational training programs for adults with limited English skills or low basic skills. These programs combine English as a Second Language, basic skills education, and GED classes with vocational training. Contact: Kathleen Bombach, Director, Literacy and Workforce Development Center, (915) 831-4432.

Staff of **Florida's Family Transition Program** in Escambia County polled employers to determine the skills they needed and worked with community colleges to set up courses to train welfare recipients in those skills. Contact: Shirley Jacques, Operations Program Administrator, Department of Children and Families, (850) 494-5918.

For More Information . . .

RESOURCE CONTACTS

American Association of Community Colleges. Contact Ashley Giglio about federal policy, Jim McKenney about local programs, (202) 728-0200; see http://www.aacc.nche.edu.

American Council on Education. Contact Judith Sturnick, (202) 939-9390.

Center for Law and Social Policy. Contact Julie Strawn, (202) 797-6536; see http://www.clasp.org.

Center for Women Policy Studies. Contact Tanya Chin, (202) 872-1770.

Institute for Women's Policy Research. Contact Johanna Finney, (202) 785-5100.

Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation. Contact Gayle Hamilton, (212) 340-8665.

National Governors' Association. Contact Susan Golonka or Rebecca Brown, (202) 624-5300.

National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges. Contact Linda Kay Benning, (202) 293-7070; see http://www.nasulgc.nche.edu/WelfareMainPg.htm.

Howard Samuels State Management and Policy Center, City University of New York. Contact Marilyn Gittell, (212) 642-2974 or mgittell@aol.com.

NETWORK Consortium, a consortium of community colleges involved in workforce development, training and literacy, provides newsletters, annual conferences on Welfare to Work, and technical assistance. Contact: Robert Visdos, (703) 359-6200; see http://www.network-consortium.org.

U.S. Department of Education. Contact Jon Weintraub, Director, Office of Policy Analysis, (202) 205-5602; Henry Smith, Senior Policy Analyst, Community College Office, (202) 401-0414; Ted Sky, Senior Counsel, (202) 401-6000, regarding legal issues.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. On policy, contact Mack Storrs, Director, Division of Self-Sufficiency, Office of Family Assistance, (202) 401-9289. On technical assistance, contact Yvonne Howard, (202) 401-4619.

U.S. Department of Labor. Contact Alicia Fernandez-Mott, Team Leader, Welfare-to-Work Technical Assistance, (202) 208-7281 ext. 183 or eta.jtp.fernandeza@doleta.gov.

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For more information on skills acquisition for welfare recipients,

See the new CLASP publication,

Beyond Job Search or Basic Education:

Rethinking the Role of Skills in Welfare Reform

Available on the web at www.clasp.org or call (202) 328-5140.

The U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services, Labor, and Education are offering two-day technical assistance workshops for staff of state and local agencies and community colleges. Workshops focus on the role of community colleges in providing pre-employment and post-employment services to welfare recipients.

Contact Yvonne Howard at (202) 401-4619.

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